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## Resources for Parents of Children with Feeding Issues

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# Resources for Parents of Children with Feeding Issues

Miranda Gutierrez, OTD-S  
Carol Rodriguez, COTA/L & The Central Florida Dreamplex

## Introduction

- About 50 percent of healthy infants and children experience feeding difficulties and up to 80 percent with developmental delays have feeding issues (Borowitz and Borowitz, 2018).
- Occupational therapy provides a client-centered approach to promote enhanced engagement in valued life occupations.
- Eating and swallowing are components of activities of daily living and are crucial occupations for children.
- Feeding and eating fulfill basic nourishment required to grow and develop and creates a social relationship between a parent and/or caregiver and their child (Henton, 2018).
- Stress associated with caring for children with feeding difficulties can result in physical and emotional strain.

## Site Description

- The Central Florida Dreamplex is an outpatient pediatric clinic with 2 locations (Orlando and Clermont).
- Population Served: Infants and young adults ranging from 8 months – 27 years
- Diagnoses Treated: Autism spectrum disorder, developmental delays, genetic disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, sensory processing disorders, feeding difficulties



Figure 1. Pediatric jungle at The Central Florida Dreamplex



Figure 2. The sensory gym at The Central Florida Dreamplex

## Summary of Needs Assessment

- Limited parental training in managing feeding issues affects caregiver confidence in their ability to carry over techniques learned in a clinic setting.
- Early access to professional support reduces parental stress.
- Stress surrounding feeding can negatively impact the feeding issues that may already be present.
- Families can benefit from additional support to prevent perpetuating a negative mealtime cycle.
- The parents who participated in my questionnaire have expressed interest in receiving additional education and resources to address feeding issues.

## Literature Review Summary

### Parent Role

- Parents have a central role in establishing the social relationship during feeding (Estrem et al., 2017; Henton, 2018).
- Feeding problems occur in the context of the parent-child relationship.
- Variations in parenting style can impact how a child views mealtimes and food which can influence the likelihood of picky eating (Chilman et al., 2021).
- Caregivers assume the responsibility of applying interventions learned from therapy services to their home environment.

### Occupational Therapist's Role

- Occupational therapists (OTs) can conduct feeding, eating, and swallowing evaluations, assess a child's fine motor development and self-feeding skills, and observe their sensory processing skills (Korth & Maune, 2020).
- OTs can provide intervention plans that enable a child's performance in feeding, eating, and swallowing to achieve improved outcomes (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2017).
- Decisions and recommendations consider cultural practices, activities appropriate to developmental status and/or medical condition, and environmental context to support feeding performance (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2017).

### Caregiver Role

- The unique care routines of children with chronic medical conditions and/or chronic feeding concerns can affect the parent-child relationship (Silverman et al., 2021; Thullen & Bonsall, 2017).
- Emotional distress of a parent can influence externalizing behavioral problems (e.g., throwing food, aggressiveness).
- The interactional relationship between inappropriate feeding behaviors, parental concern and self-doubt, extended mealtimes, and maladaptive parent/feeder strategies contribute to a negative mealtime cycle.



Figure 3. Family eating dinner. Adapted from "The Ideals and Realities of Family Dinner with Young Kids" by L. Ma, 2022. Psychology Today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/evidence-based-living/202204/the-ideals-and-realities-family-dinner-young-kids>

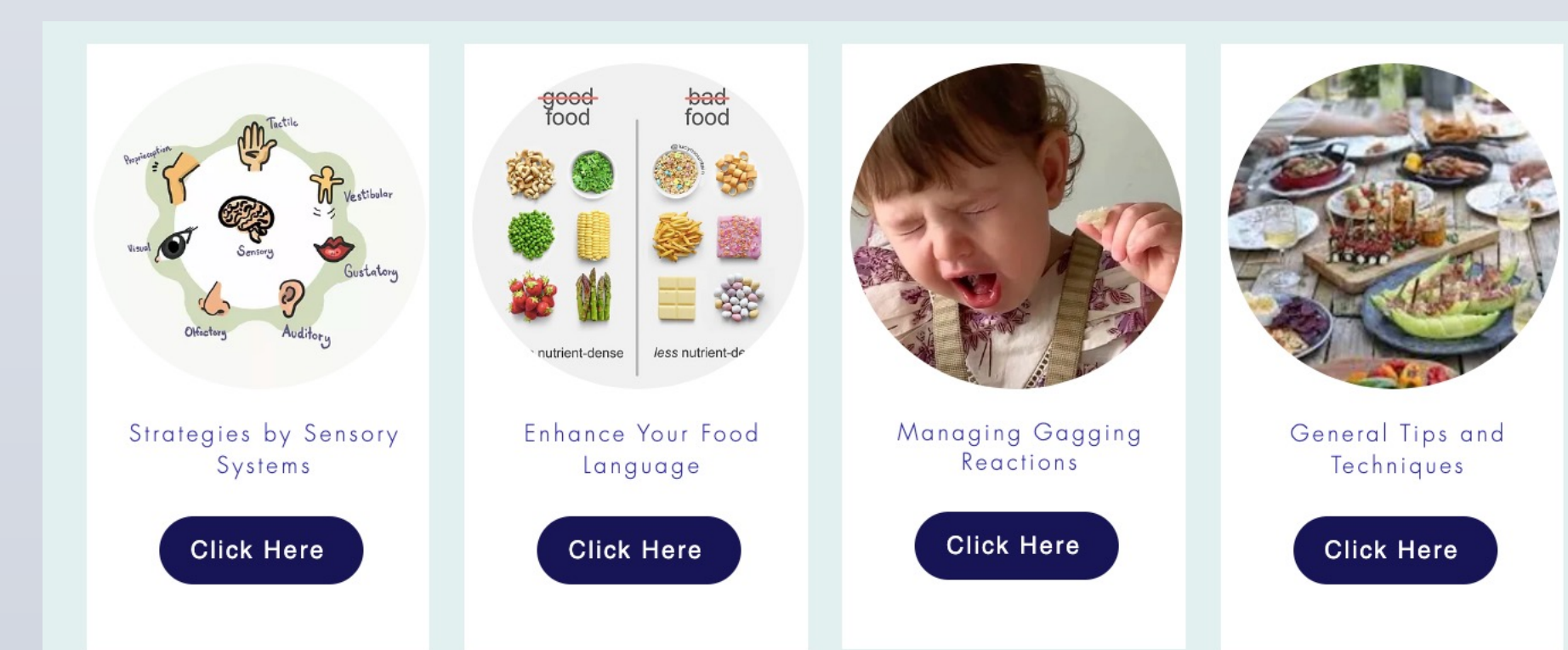


Figure 4. Sample of the website page

## Capstone Project Description

- The main goal of my capstone project was to create a support tool for families that would provide several evidence-based intervention strategies and clinician advice that can be accessed at any time to supplement current therapy services received at the Central Florida Dreamplex
- I created a digitally accessible and updateable website for parents/caregivers to help reinforce skills addressed in occupational therapy interventions, as well as provide a starting point for the families that are receiving services for other deficits, however, experience feeding issues at home.
- The website includes pages with:
  - A brief overview of the profession
  - Specialized knowledge of feeding
  - Elements of a feeding evaluation
  - Occupational therapy's role and treatment options
  - Additional resources for caregivers from the input received
- Website Link: <https://mirandalg44.wixsite.com/feedingwithot>

Typical Progression of Feeding Skills				
Eating is a complex physical task children must complete to intake nutritional sources for growth and development. Self-feeding skills are an important aspect of becoming healthy and independent with eating. Here is a tool you can use to view the developmental milestones for feeding that average children meet by certain ages.				
Age	Motor-Physical skills	Oral-motor skills	Self-feeding skills	Assessment tools
6-12 months	Learning to control head and neck movements Learning to hold and bring food to mouth Learning to use spoon and fork Learning to use cup and glass Learning to use knife and fork	Use of oral-motor skills to hold and manipulate food Use of oral-motor skills to chew and swallow Use of oral-motor skills to suck and swallow Use of oral-motor skills to suck and swallow	Feeding by spoon and fork Feeding by cup and glass Feeding by knife and fork	Shows self-feeding skills
1-2 years	Shows self-feeding skills Shows self-feeding skills Shows self-feeding skills Shows self-feeding skills Shows self-feeding skills	Use of oral-motor skills to hold and manipulate food Use of oral-motor skills to chew and swallow Use of oral-motor skills to suck and swallow Use of oral-motor skills to suck and swallow	Feeding by spoon and fork Feeding by cup and glass Feeding by knife and fork	Shows self-feeding skills
2-3 years	Shows self-feeding skills Shows self-feeding skills Shows self-feeding skills Shows self-feeding skills Shows self-feeding skills	Use of oral-motor skills to hold and manipulate food Use of oral-motor skills to chew and swallow Use of oral-motor skills to suck and swallow Use of oral-motor skills to suck and swallow	Feeding by spoon and fork Feeding by cup and glass Feeding by knife and fork	Shows self-feeding skills
3-4 years	Shows self-feeding skills Shows self-feeding skills Shows self-feeding skills Shows self-feeding skills Shows self-feeding skills	Use of oral-motor skills to hold and manipulate food Use of oral-motor skills to chew and swallow Use of oral-motor skills to suck and swallow Use of oral-motor skills to suck and swallow	Feeding by spoon and fork Feeding by cup and glass Feeding by knife and fork	Shows self-feeding skills
4-5 years	Shows self-feeding skills Shows self-feeding skills Shows self-feeding skills Shows self-feeding skills Shows self-feeding skills	Use of oral-motor skills to hold and manipulate food Use of oral-motor skills to chew and swallow Use of oral-motor skills to suck and swallow Use of oral-motor skills to suck and swallow	Feeding by spoon and fork Feeding by cup and glass Feeding by knife and fork	Shows self-feeding skills

Figure 5. Sample of "typical progression of feeding skills" handout



Figure 6. Sample of continuing education received

## Learning Objectives Achieved

- Designed an online feeding therapy resource to outline feeding difficulties seen in this pediatric setting and recommendations on ways to help address feeding issues at home.
- Further developed clinical practice skills in the specialized area of feeding, eating, and swallowing within the pediatric population.
- Demonstrated effective communication skills with parents and healthcare professionals to increase personal and professional development.



Figure 7. Oral motor toolbox used at the clinic

## Implications for OT Practice

- An updatable, online medium can prepare and guide families through the process of evaluation and treatment.
- This can also increase caregiver confidence in their ability to engage with their child during the co-occupations of feeding and eating.
- Educational materials produced and distributed can help advocate for occupational therapy's role in supporting caregivers and families in enhancing their child's engagement in current feeding routines.
- OTs can emphasize the importance of the interdisciplinary team role and the need to educate others on the multiple facets of the feeding experience.
- Families can understand how to create an environment that fosters open communication about feeding, identify the wants and needs dictated by their child, and how to appropriately respond to these requests.

## REFERENCES & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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References Available Upon Request